

Submitted Testimony
Mayor Mitch Landrieu, City of New Orleans
Thursday, August 26, 2010
United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs,
Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery

Thank you to Senators Landrieu and Graham for holding this hearing in such an appropriate place, and at such an appropriate time. This week we commemorate the 5th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina by remembering the more than 1800 Americans who lost their lives, and honoring the resiliency of the residents who have returned and those that remain displaced. We also acknowledge the many people and organizations from around the country who have unselfishly lent a hand in our recovery.

We appreciate the opportunity to share with the rest of the country the lessons we have learned throughout this recovery.

Because of the massive devastation caused by Katrina, New Orleans has emerged as America's most immediate laboratory for innovation and change. Since Katrina, New Orleanians have worked together to rebuild our city. We value the federal government's partnership as we continually work towards rebuilding a city for the 21st century.

After five painful years, our working relationship with FEMA has improved. Just yesterday, the Agency confirmed that the city will receive a \$1.8 billion lump-sum settlement to rebuild the schools destroyed by Katrina. We will finally be able to get our children out of temporary buildings. This settlement will fund the next phase of our school facilities master plan, which will make schools the centers of neighborhood renewal.

We are working in partnership with the Department of Justice to reform the New Orleans Police Department. The city is doing its part by selecting the country's best police chief, reorganizing the management structure of the NOPD, creating greater transparency, beefing up the homicide unit, and putting more police on the streets instead of behind desks. We look forward to instituting the reforms prescribed by DOJ and we appreciate Department's help.

But the only way to successfully reduce crime in the long term is to provide our children with the education they deserve. We are reforming New Orleans public schools with remarkable success. Over 60 percent of our public schools are charters, student performance has improved for three years in a row, and the percentage of students attending what the state considers 'quality schools' has increased from 28 to 59 percent.

In an example of necessity breeding innovation, New Orleans has become the model for national Health Care reform. In the absence of hospitals destroyed by Katrina, a network of 87 neighborhood health clinics provides affordable, primary care to 292,000 residents.

But none of these successes will bear fruit if we do not adequately protect the city from future hurricanes. We must have category 5 flood protection, and we must rebuild our coast. South Louisiana's coastal wetlands not only provide a staging and processing platform for 25% of our

domestic energy supply. They provide the most important barrier to catastrophic storms that our coastal communities have. And as Katrina has surely taught us, New Orleans is now a coastal city. The Mississippi River delta is the fastest-disappearing land mass on earth. We must do all we can to stop the damage and restore our wetlands.

Before the well was plugged, the BP oil gusher spewed over 200 million gallons of oil into the Gulf. That is the equivalent of an Exxon Valdez disaster every four days. This has devastated the economy of south Louisiana. And New Orleans, already dealing with a \$78 million budget shortfall due to mismanagement, dropping revenue, and irresponsible budgeting, has certainly felt the effects. According to the Clean Water Act, the federal government can fine BP up to \$21 billion dollars. The lion's share of these funds should go to the people of the Gulf Coast to restore the damage done.

The Landrieu/Domenici Gulf of Mexico Security Act promises the Gulf Coast states their fair share of offshore oil royalties, which will be dedicated to restoring the coast. However, the revenue sharing does not go into effect until 2017. Knowing this, Senator Landrieu has introduced the RESPOND Act, which would enact a fair share and begin construction on coastal projects immediately. Congress should pass the RESPOND Act, and President Obama should sign it.

In addition the industry must do its part to restore and maintain the very land that it uses to support its operations. An ethic of conservation and stewardship as old as the country itself must be renewed.

Ironically, because of the Hurricane Katrina and the BP oil gusher, New Orleans is poised to become the city that defines 21st century America. Our success or failure will be the symbol of America's ability to accomplish great things.